

S vs Rebirth 271

Chapter 271 Hawk

'This is...' Noel's heart thumped while taking a peek at the demon he just found. The demon was none other than the hawk itself. But unlike any other hawk, its size was at least four times bigger than what he knew.

With such a wingspan, the hawk would be extremely heavy and its momentum would be far more powerful. The fact that this hawk was an Advanced Level Demon was also a problem.

'What should I do now? I have never fought against a flying demon. I do have the Hyper Jump that allowed me to kick the air a few times, but it can't be compared to flying in the air.'

'There is also another problem. The Advanced Level Demon can command low level demons, so if the Low Level Demon comes, I'm afraid I'll be in a disadvantage.'

Noel also considered one more thing. Since there were a few villages at the foot of the mountain, he had to kill them in one swoop to avoid future problems.

'Since the demons can cause havoc, I should contain them in one place. But it's going to be impossible to fight them together with the giant hawk. I should retreat first.'

Noel thought he could finish this mission in an instant, but it seemed that he should talk about it with the villagers first, considering their safety would be threatened.

Now that he had found the hawk, it didn't take too long for him to go back because he had remembered his and the village's locations.

The investigation didn't even last for a whole day because Noel had found the hawk sooner than expected.

So, when he reached the village, all of them were already sleeping.

Jasmine had given him a room to rest, but he didn't know whether he should disturb her at this time.

'It's midnight... should I just wait until dawn?' Noel muttered inwardly while pushing the door, surprisingly finding it unlocked. 'Huh?'

Noel thought she would be locking the door. Even if this village was safe and peaceful, it didn't change the fact that she should lock the door during the night.

But when Noel opened the door and entered quietly, Jasmine was there to greet him. Though, it wasn't literally.

Jasmine was sitting in the couch near the door as if waiting for him to come back. But due to the time, her eyes were already closed like she had fallen asleep.

If there was a paper or a book in her hand, Noel would believe that she was overworking herself. But there was nothing in her hand, showing that she was actually waiting for him this whole time.

However, the creaking noise from the door seemed to alarm her as her body convulsed for a moment before she let out a soft moan.

"Mhm?" She raised her head as if sensing someone's presence. Then, she rubbed her sleepy eyes to see it clearly, finding Noel standing before her. "Noel?!"

"Sorry for waking you up." Noel felt embarrassed. He thought about carrying her to her bed as thanks, but it turned out she had woken up before that.

"It seems that I accidentally fell asleep. I thought you were lost in the mountain and I prepared to set up a team to search for you... But then again, I know that Demon Banner Army's knights weren't that weak either. So, I planned to wait for you until dawn but I guess I was too sleepy."

"Ahaha, you should sleep again." Noel smiled.

"No. Since you have come back, let me bring some water for you." Jasmine gracefully rose and walked to the kitchen. She glanced at Noel's expression and asked, "What's wrong? Did you find something? The forest should be dark, right?"

"Yeah. But that's not a problem for me."

"Do you have a Moon Blessing or something? So, that's why you're not coming back during the night. Though, you shouldn't push yourself too far during the night. The chilling wind and the cold temperature harm your body."

"It's fine. I'm used to it. Anyway, you should sleep first. I'll talk about it later."

"No. Let's talk about it now. It doesn't seem the problem is that small." Jasmine shook her head while waiting for the water to boil.

Seeing her determination, Noel leaned on the wall and said, "There is an Advanced Level Demon near the top of the mountain."

"Oh my? Advanced Level Demon? This is quite troubling. If I'm not wrong, you're still an Apprentice Knight, right? We should immediately inform the Demon Banner Army to send reinforcement. I can't have you risk your life for nothing."

"Yeah. That's what I'm thinking as well. Although I can kill Advanced Level Demon and I have experienced it a few times, I don't want to bring any dangers to the villagers. If I just fight the Advanced Level Demon alone, I should have no problem. But the other demons might attack me or even worse rush to the villages. At that time, I don't want to think what will happen."

Noel decided to put down his pride because people's lives mattered. If he was egoistic and fought those demons, he would win the battle but could he still claim he had won the war if the demons destroyed the villages and killed the villagers?

That was why he decided to call the reinforcement.

Though, Jasmine's shock was clearly written in her face. "You can kill an Advanced Level Demon?"

"Yes. Is that a problem?"

"Wait, wait!" Jasmine waved her hand to stop Noel before facepalming. "I just want to confirm this. You are an Apprentice Knight, right?"

"Yes."

"Isn't an Apprentice Knight at the level of a Mid Level Demon? I know that an Apprentice Knight who is about to graduate is as strong as a Mid Level Demon, but this is the first time I've heard that an Apprentice Knight can kill an Advanced Level Demon."

"Is there something wrong with me being able to kill an Advanced Level Demon?" Noel tilted his head in confusion.

"..."

Chapter 272 Danger

"There is no problem, but that's not normal. I mean, even a full-fledged knight will have some problems against an Advanced Level Demon." Jasmine shook her head, feeling troubled.

She wanted to think Noel was boasting, but his expression said otherwise. That was why she couldn't tell him off, especially with the fact that Noel was her former boss' son.

"The Ardagan Family is truly extraordinary. To think that you have that ability at your age without being known... If someone knows a fifteen years old boy can kill an Advanced Level Demon, the capital will be shocked. Yet, there is completely nothing about you." Jasmine sighed.

"Well, you should know about the rumor about me, right?"

"Yes. A lazy young master..."

"There's nothing wrong with it. I was completely helpless a few months ago."

"Are you serious? Do you seriously want me to believe it? Calculating the time, you should have just entered the Demon Banner Army for nine months. Yet, you claim you've gotten strong enough to kill an Advanced Level Demon?" Jasmine frowned, examining Noel's expression.

"I won't argue with you since it's already late... Anyway, you can choose either to believe it or not. I won't be pushing that kind of idea." Noel shook his head. "I mean, the only reason why I'm talking to you right now is because I don't want any casualties."

"Ah..." Jasmine pinched the bridge of her nose, realizing she was too obsessed with his strength that she forgot the main objective. "Sorry, you were just too absurd that I forgot about it."

"It's fine. You seem to want to believe it as well."

"You are Count Ardagan's son. Knowing him, he might be able to do something like that. I mean, he is a great merchant and merchant fights with information. Spreading the rumor to make others look down on you is not difficult."

"Certainly." Noel nodded. "In fact, I'm curious about your view toward my family, especially my father. But I can wait until I've finished my job here."

"Sure." Jasmine nodded. Since she didn't know that his execution was a fake, she thought Noel was just missing his father. That was why she pitied Noel to lose a good father like him.

"Anyway, you should sleep first. We can ask for reinforcement in the morning."

"I understand." Jasmine nodded in agreement.

But when she was about to go back to her room, a loud cry startled the village.

"!!!" Noel and Jasmine widened their eyes in shock, staring at each other.

Both of them realized what kind of monster letting out this cry.

"The hawk?!" They said the same thing as if confirming their guess.

Without hesitation, they rushed to the outside and saw the hawk flying on top of them.

"What?" Noel clenched his teeth while pulling out his sword. "Did I bring the hawk to this village?"

"No. The hawk's speed is far greater than you and it can fly... If you bring the hawk here, we won't even have any discussion. The twenty minutes gap is not enough to prove it."

"..." Noel fell silent while glancing at her. "You go to the villagers and wake them up. I'll stop the Hawk! For now, gather in one building so that I can protect everyone in the village. If the demons come, I want all of you to leave the village right away. I promise I'm going to protect all of you!"

"But you—" Jasmine wanted to refuse the request but it would just hinder him doing his job. Although a part of her didn't believe Noel could defeat an Advanced Level Demon, she knew that obstructing his job also meant danger. Hence, she took up the quest. "I understand. Be careful."

Noel nodded and created a rune on top of his head, shooting two chains to capture the hawk in the sky.

The hawk casually avoided it by its great maneuverability. After that, the hawk dove down to kill Noel.

This was what Noel wanted. The moment the hawk demon reached him, Noel struck his blade to its beak.

He thought about using his ice, but knowing that the danger was far greater than anything he had faced so far, Noel released all his ability.

The sword released a flame and caused an explosion.

Ignition Sword.

Boom!

The explosion blasted the hawk to the air, creating a parabolic movement to the outside of the village. He didn't want to endanger the village, including the building, so he had to keep the fight outside.

After that, Noel chased after the hawk before it could fly in the sky anymore. But when he arrived, he saw the hawk demon not injured by his Ignition Sword at all.

The Ignition Sword could even destroy a Mid Level Demon's body, yet, it didn't leave a single scratch on this Advanced Level Demon. It seemed that the Advanced Level Demon this time was tougher than he originally expected.

Before the battle fight, Noel activated Increase Agility Rune and Strength Blessing Rune before enveloping his body with Spirit Aura Breathing. This was going to be a hard fight, but he had to finish the hawk before any other demons came.

The hawk demon flapped its wings, flying again. But Noel leaped into the air and struck the hawk demon from above.

Seeing Noel's blade and remembering the explosion that would come after this slash, the hawk demon tried to tilt its body to avoid the entire swing.

"Tsk." Noel clicked his tongue because the hawk demon succeeded in avoiding him and was about to soar to the sky. He hurriedly kicked the air and outran the hawk demon, stopping him again.

'I can't use Hyper Jump too many times, so I have to make sure I can take down this hawk now.' Noel summoned three giant swords above the hawk. But he positioned it so they made an incomplete box. With Noel becoming one of the box's side, it would create a perfect encirclement.

The hawk demon saw this and stopped in its track.

Noel thought this was a successful strategy, but the hawk actually used its talons to kick Noel in the chest.

Noel didn't avoid it. The damage was completely absorbed by the armor, but he still felt the pain.

"Kh. Get down!" Noel endured the pain while roaring, smashing the bird's beak with his Ignition Sword.

Boom!

Chapter 273 Martial Hawk

Seeing the hawk demon had crashed to the ground, Noel also fell down, following the demon. He was planning to suppress this demon on the ground since this was the only way to defeat it before other demons came.

With a glance, he could also see that Jasmine was waking up the villagers by banging their doors. One by one came out to see what was going on and immediately followed her when they saw him fighting the demon.

They were scared because an Advanced Level Demon was extremely dangerous. It could destroy their villages in an instant. That was why Noel was here to stop it.

Noel stood between the hawk demon and the village, maintaining this position.

Seeing the hawk demon was about to flap its wings again, Noel leaped forth and slashed downwards.

The hawk demon wasn't planning to go down either. It spread its wings, taking advantage of its tough skin to push Noel's blade.

However, Noel noticed the hawk's strength. Just like any other demons, the hawk possessed strengths and weaknesses.

'As expected, its strength lies on its nimbleness and tough skin. However, the hawk doesn't possess enough power to push me away. In other words, I should take advantage of this difference in strength.'

Noel examined the eagle for a moment while pinning it on the ground with his sword.

The hawk demon was glaring at Noel as if ordering him to let him go. Noel couldn't kill it easily due to the tough skin, but it didn't change the fact he could somehow suppress him.

Looking at Noel's strength, even Jasmine, who was in the middle of evacuating the people, was impressed. She was stunned for a moment and asked out loud, "Noel, are you done?"

The hawk demon's eyes flashed before it flapped its wings, creating a powerful gale that knocked Noel back.

"The hawk is changing its target?" Noel found the hawk trying to fly to Jasmine. Even though Jasmine didn't come closer, her voice was truly loud enough for the hawk to recognize her.

It might be the hawk's instinct to prey on something weaker first, so it changed its target in an instant.

"No, you don't!" Noel formed Chain Bind Rune and released two chains.

The hawk tried to outrun it, but he only managed to avoid one while the other chain managed to catch his right foot.

The hawk demon stopped in the air. He struggled to escape but to no avail.

Taking advantage of this situation, Noel leaped to the eagle and pinned it to the ground as well.

He shouted to Jasmine. "The demons can recognize you as an easier prey, so make sure you don't talk too loud. Hurry up and hide!"

Jasmine was about to apologize but she heard what Noel said earlier. If she apologized too loud, the demon would recognize her again. If she didn't want to say that out loud, she had to go closer to Noel, which was also a fatal mistake.

Even Noel understood that this was the risk of his job. After all, he couldn't expect normal people to know that much detail from the demons.

Luckily, Jasmine was a smart woman. She recognized her mistake and didn't repeat it.

She wanted to apologize but that could wait until the threat was solved. Hence, she only bowed to him as an apology and hurriedly returned to help the others.

He took a glance at Jasmine and the people, recognizing that she had done a good work. In just a few minutes, Jasmine seemed to be able to gather at least half the villagers. As long as he could keep this up for another few minutes, she should be able to gather all villagers in one building, making it easier to protect them.

Now that the hawk was pinned on the ground again, Noel changed his tactic. He couldn't kill the demon with his Ignition Sword, so he could change his strategy.

A snowflake appeared above them as Noel leaped back, allowing the snowflake to hit the hawk.

"!!!" The demon was surprised and hurriedly changed its direction. Even though his foot was chained by Noel, it could still move to the side to avoid this dangerous ability.

Still, due to the unexpected use of ice ability, the hawk demon was a bit too late. The ice crystal exploded, freezing anything in a few meters radius.

The hawk managed to get away from it, but the ice managed to freeze half of its right wing.

As an Advanced Level Demon, it obviously had some intelligence. It knew that a human could only possess one element. Yet, Noel actually used two elements.

That was why it was shocked. The demon thought Noel could only release fire that wouldn't harm him.

Noel was actually planning to kill him from the inside by freezing his organs.

However, the hawk realized it was wrong once again when he saw three giant blades above him.

Cry!

The hawk let out a cry as if it was scared and started moving to the center of the chain to avoid those swords.

This was Noel's real plan. He wanted to freeze the hawk to stop its movement for a second before using his Sword Fall to crush it.

However, the Sword Fall's extraordinary strength actually worked in the demon's favor. It used its talon to kick the chain, causing the giant sword to fall on the chains, crushing it.

"What?" Noel widened his eyes in shock. This was the first time Noel fought a demon that took advantage of his ability to their favor. It also showed that the demon's intelligence was far above the demons he'd fought so far.

Noel gritted his teeth, trying to stop the hawk demon from leaving the ground.

The hawk didn't plan to get trapped with the same technique twice, so instead of flying, the hawk actually caught Noel's blade by taking advantage of its tough skin.

After that, it kicked Noel in the stomach, knocking him back.

"Kh." Noel endured the pain while looking at the hawk. "What are you? A hawk that knows a Martial Art?"

However, the danger was elevated to a whole new level when a series of roar suddenly shook the mountain.

Roar!

Roar!

Roar!

Chapter 274 Shame

"!!!" Noel opened his mouth in surprise. It turned out the previous cry was the hawk calling other demons on the mountain. It planned to raze the village to the ground.

'Ugh. Should I order them to evacuate the village? But according to the roar, I know they still need at least a few minutes to reach here. But if it's too late, it's going to be a problem...' Noel thought for a moment.

The hawk saw this opportunity and flew to the sky.

'Ah, it used the split second I was in deep thought to fly?' Noel clicked his tongue and leaped into the sky and started using his Hyper Jump to chase after the hawk.

The hawk suddenly stopped and flapped its wings to create another gale that could blow him away.

'I can dodge—!' Noel suddenly remembered something and glanced back, realizing that the hawk was planning to destroy the village if he dodged this attack. 'How is this hawk so intelligence?'

He finally realized why it would be wise to fight Advanced Level Demon or above with a group instead of going alone. Their wisdom had been opened and the demon wouldn't let go of an opportunity to weaken the opponent.

,m He could choose not to care, but this wasn't Noel if he abandoned the village behind him.

Noel took a deep breath and raised his sword above his head. His expression became cold as if it was targeting both the gale and the hawk.

When the hawk sent the powerful gale toward him, Noel opened his eyes while gritting his teeth. "How dare you?!"

The anger was transferred into his sword. With the addition of the Spirit Weaponry that the Sword Saint taught him, Noel sliced the gale into two.

He didn't use other emotions that was more suited to protect, but this was the best outcome he had so far.

Noel was already used to anger because of Anna, so he could release more of its power than any other emotions. He imagined the people below were brutally murdered by the hawk, evoking his anger.

He utilized this anger with his Everchanging Emotion Sword Style to split the gale into half, causing the wind to go in two directions.

Although it didn't destroy the house, the gale hit the farmlands, destroying it.

"Tsk." Noel clicked his tongue. He was angry at himself for not being able to protect everything.

That was why he kicked the air again and flew to the hawk.

"Die, you demon!" Noel gritted his teeth, making a sharp slash to the hawk's neck.

As a flying animal, the hawk could maneuver easily in the air, dodging this slash. But Noel's aim wasn't the slash.

He already knew that his slash would be avoided, so he let go of his sword and caught the hawk with his hand.

"Undying Fire."

Noel released his black flame to burn the hawk.

Cry!

The hawk was struggling. Although his skin was tough, the Undying Fire was simply too fierce.

The hawk tried to extinguish it but to no avail. The fire simply flared up again and again, cooking the bird alive.

Noel felt a sharp pain in his head, realizing the toll that the Undying Fire had in his body.

He endured the pain and kicked the demon to the ground.

Little did Noel know, the people at the bottom actually thought of him as a savior. Due to the night, they couldn't see the black flame very clearly.

That was why they thought the hawk demon was the one using that flame. And with the addition of the explosion they first heard in the beginning, they believed this was the case.

They never thought that Noel Ignition Sword and Undying Fire was actually the culprit.

"Incredible." Jasmine clenched her fists. "Even the most outstanding Apprentice Knight only manage to fight Mid Level Demons from what I know. But he can actually fight an Advanced Level Demon?"

"What did you say? That hawk is an Advanced Level Demon? Impossible. He is too young to be able to defeat an Advanced Level Demon."

"But that's the case."

"The demon must be extremely weak."

"I don't think so." Jasmine gulped down. "If you take another look at the battle from here, he keeps slashing the demon but not a single attack actually penetrate its skin. The demon is only afraid of those big swords. From the looks of it, it penetrates the ground quite deep, so the power is extraordinary. That's why I believe that hawk is an Advanced Level Demon."

"So, he can save us?"

"But there are roars coming from the mountain. More demons are approaching!"

"That's right." Jasmine turned around and shouted, "Let's descend the mountain. For now, we have to leave this village to make sure we're not becoming his burden."

"But our houses... A part of our farm has also been destroyed. It's near winter."

"The land can be restored and the house can be rebuilt. However, if you die, then it's over! That's why we have to leave. We're only a month away from winter, but we have a good harvest this year. There should be enough food to last for winter."

When they heard Jasmine's words, they agreed with her and finally decided to leave the village for now.

Noel, on the other hand, was too focused on the hawk because he had to kill this demon before the demons.

"Sword Fall!"

The three giant swords appeared again, trying to kill the burning hawk on the ground.

Despite the constant pain from being cooked alive, the hawk still managed to avoid these three swords, albeit barely.

Seeing that the hawk's movement speed had decreased a bit, Noel took this chance to test another emotion.

It was the shame. He felt ashamed that his sword couldn't even penetrate the demon's skin, so he used that shame to fill his sword, giving it a penetration power.

"Ha!" Noel shouted while stabbing the hawk.

The latter felt a danger from the tip of Noel's blade, so it rolled its body to dodge. Unfortunately, Noel was different than the Sword Fall. He managed to change the trajectory of his thrust and managed to impale the hawk's wing.

Cry!

The hawk let out another cry of pain because this was the first time Noel managed to penetrate its skin.

However, that advantage didn't last long because the roars had finally reached his position.

"!!!"

Roar! Ten demons suddenly came out of the woods, ready to pounce on him.

Chapter 275 Killing The Hawk

"Tsk." Noel pointed his palm at the demons and released a snowflake. "Freezing Crystal."

The snowflake exploded, sending the cold into all direction and covering everything with a thick layer of ice.

He could see that some demons were trapped inside ice, some were outright dying, while the rest managed to stay alive with some injuries.

However, the demon he worried the most was the hawk. He hurriedly checked the hawk, not wanting his flame to be extinguished by the ice.

Luckily, when he found the hawk demon, the flame was still burning. As expected of the Undying Fire, its ferocity was at a different level. He wondered if there was anything that could wash away that flame.

He even thought if he could defeat Anna with this flame.

"In any case, I can't use this fire that easily and even if I do, I need to touch their bodies before activating it." Noel shook his head helplessly before turning his head around, seeing the demons who managed to stay alive to charge at him.

He took another glance at the village and realized they had evacuated properly. So, he didn't hesitate to cover his sword with the black flame.

Sword Fire.

He slashed the first Low Level Demon that came after him, slicing its body easily as if the fire was tenderizing the meat that the sword had to cut. Even the cut wound was burned, engulfing its organs.

There were a few more demons that he had to cut, so he kept slashing one after another, killing them.

As soon as he killed all of them, he immediately changed direction to pursue the hawk. But to his surprise, the hawk was causing all kinds of mess.

It was slamming the body to the trees and the ground because of the fire. The entire area looked wet, yet, the fire burning them was not a normal one. Even if the rain came, it was doubtful if it could stop the flame.

"..." Noel didn't want to start a forest fire, so he had to retract his Undying Flame.

Fortunately, the flame on the soils and the trees disappeared as well, but not without leaving a charred mark on the burning part.

Meanwhile, the hawk realized the flame had vanished, allowing him to retain his life. He had to escape because his body was weakened by the fire. Even his organs felt like they were already charred by that black flame.

Noel didn't let the hawk demon go and sent forth a pair of chains from the rune to capture the hawk.

When he was about to reach the hawk, another wave of demons came out, stopping him.

"Tsk." Noel clicked his tongue and jumped back, glaring at these demons. "How many demons are hiding on this mountain?"

He suddenly saw a light among them. There was a demon who was gathering Spiritual Energy in its horn and released a lightning strike.

Noel summoned his Spiritual Energy Dispersion Rune, causing the lightning to disperse in all directions.

After that, he charged at the demons and struck the ground with his Ignition Sword.

The blast caused the dust to rise, hiding Noel from them.

They tried to use their noses to track Noel but the charred smell was too strong, causing them to lose Noel inside. On the other hand, Noel had his Demon Hunter Medal, sensing their presence all the time.

He swiftly slipped past them and reached the hawk without fighting another demon.

The hawk immediately leaped into the air to kick Noel's head, but Noel summoned his Sword Fall.

When the three swords were about to reach the hawk, they began to curve. The new trajectory startled the hawk as the latter tried to move around to avoid them.

However, the sudden change caused the hawk having a hard time to dodge them and one of the swords ended up hitting its wing, pinning the demon to the ground and ultimately cutting the hawk's wing.

Cry!

The hawk was lying down on the ground as if it had given up after one of its wings was cut.

The other demons realized their leader was injured, so they rushed back to help. Sadly, Noel had predicted their movement and released his Freezing Crystal, stopping them.

Roar!

Roar!

The demons were unwilling to be stopped, but they couldn't move their bodies due to the ice. Only two of them managed to continue, but Noel swiftly cut them down with his Sword Fire.

After that, Noel returned to the hawk and utilized his Sword Fall again, killing the Advanced Level Demon.

"Did I kill it?" Noel muttered while checking the system. As soon as he got the confirmation, Noel turned around as he knew there might be more demons coming, so he struck down a few of them while making the rest to release a distress roar. This way, more and more demons would come in.

It took one hour for Noel to kill the rest of the demons. He had exhausted most of his Spiritual Energy.

"As expected... The Sword Fall and the Undying Fire are draining my Spiritual Energy. Even though they're powerful, I can't rely on them too much because I'll be in disadvantage if I don't have any more Spiritual Energy." Noel let out a sigh of relief and dropped to the ground.

"I feel like there are more things to discover about the Advanced Level Demon. Just like a Spirit Wielder, an Advanced Level Demon can be stronger than the others. Also, from what I've found in this fight, they seem to have a difference in wisdom as well.

"The Hawk is surely the most intelligent Advanced Level Demon I've fought so far. I can still solve this one, but it's surprising that there is an Advanced Level Demon in this area..." Noel furrowed his eyebrows and shook his head, almost forgetting there was another important matter he had to take care of.

"That's right. The battle caused a lot of destruction. It seems I have to apologize to the villagers." Noel sighed and stood up since he was going to search for them.

Chapter 276 Apology

"Oi!" Noel waved his hands to the distance.

The people from the village were confused because they could hear the voice but see no one due to the darkness.

Noel forgot that the only reason he could find them was the Moon Blessing, so he came closer. "I'm here!"

"Ah, that's the boy!"

Jasmine was the first one to run to him, checking his condition. "Are you alright? Is there any wound?"

"Ahaha, I'm quite lucky." Noel chuckled.

Jasmine let out a sigh of relief. "That's good then."

"I should be the one apologizing to all of you. I seem to have caused a lot of destruction in the surrounding area." Noel lowered his head, apologizing to Jasmine and all the villagers.

"Wait, wait! Don't lower your head! Even though you have been stripped from your rank, you were a noble. You shouldn't lower your head that easily! And I can't truly accept it because I was once your father's subordinate."

"What? He was a noble?"

"Jasmine was his father's subordinate?"

The villagers were stunned because of Noel's extraordinary background. However, Noel shook his head and explained, "If lowering my head is enough to undo all the destruction, then I don't mind lowering my head. Unfortunately, the destroyed farmlands and buildings won't be restored with only this action. So, the least I can do is to apologize. I'm sorry."

"..." Jasmine's body trembled as if seeing his father's figure in him. Luke always thought himself a commoner instead of a noble. That was why he could see something that noble couldn't like discovering the talent in the street.

There were various problems of why people didn't utilize their talent. They might not have enough money, there might be another problem in their house, or they might simply lose the desire to do it. By becoming one of the people, he talked to the others sincerely and found those people, who he groomed.

Noel was similar to him in that regard. He considered himself a normal person and behaved like one. He didn't realize that others thought of him as a noble, not a commoner, even if he had been stripped from his title. And seeing a noble lowering their head moved the people's hearts.

An old man stepped forward and said with a smile. "Please don't lower your head, Sir Noel. Jasmine once said that the building can be rebuilt but people's death can't be undone. That's why we're already grateful enough."

"We have also seen your kind gesture by taking the fight outside our village, minimizing the damage. That's why please raise your head."

Noel hesitated for a moment before sighing, "Still, the winter is around the corner."

"We have enough food and items that can keep us warm. We truly don't mind."

"..." Noel took a deep breath as if he had given up. "I understand. I think I've killed all the demons, but I'll go around the mountain again tomorrow to make sure there's no more demons."

"Please do. Thank you very much." The old man nodded with a smile.

The silence after this conversation made it awkward, so Jasmine hurriedly dragged Noel back to the village. "Alright. Let's go back. You must be tired, so you have to rest now."

Noel didn't know that Jasmine was the biggest reason why the villagers could accept the condition this easily.

...

A moment ago.

"Why does our village have to be attacked?"

"There might be people dying in this winter."

"That knight mustn't think of us because he has a good life in the Demon Banner Army."

"The typical soldier of the Demon Banner Army."

The people were complaining about Noel, thinking the attack was due to Noel's carelessness.

Hearing their comments were like an insult to her, so Jasmine shouted, "The situation is not like that!"

"!!!" The shout startled everyone as they looked at Jasmine in shock. This might be the first time Jasmine looked so angry.

"Jasmine?"

"What's wrong with you?"

"You must be angry at the knight as well!"

Jasmine gritted her teeth and said, "No. The situation is not like that. Noel... I mean, the knight has returned for at least half an hour. During those thirty minutes, he was discussing with me about the countermeasure for the hawk demon.

"He himself has the power to kill an Advanced Level Demon, but he chose to lower his head to ask for reinforcement from the Demon Banner Army. Do you know what this means?

"Even though he could get the credit for himself, he chose not to claim it because he was worried about our safety! By getting help from the Demon Banner Army, he had to let go of everything, his pride, his reward..."

Jasmine clenched her fists, glaring at them. "That's why I'm telling you that's not the situation. He is not like what you people think.

"It's just I don't know how, but the hawk seems to be attacking us out of nowhere. It might look like the knight is poking the demon to act, but the demon will surely not wait for that long to attack us. If the demon notices him, it will attack. Don't you think so?"

The people looked at each other as if agreeing to her words.

"That's right. The demon that I know usually attack people without any warning."

"Then, the hawk should do the same, right?"

"But if what Jasmine said is true... Then, why is it thirty minutes?"

"Is it truly the hawk's own impulse?"

"There are no other explanations..."

Jasmine paused for a moment before saying, "Just remember the previous fight, instead of fighting in the village, he fights outside the village to keep the damage minimal. He truly doesn't want to involve us."

"Now that I think about it, the farmland was destroyed because he blocked an attack that was supposed to crush us."

"That's right. He might not be like what we think."

The people realized they had mistaken about Noel.

Jasmine could even see their ashamed faces and felt relieved since he had convinced them. She also felt bad for endangering them because that shout actually made the hawk attack them and Noel had to take the blame. So, the only thing she could do was helping him convincing these people.

Chapter 277 Pledge

"This is the proof of completion." Jasmine handed the letter to Noel.

After taking some rest last night, Noel immediately got back to work the next day, making sure that no more demons would come to terrorize them.

Now that he had finished his job, Noel got his proof of completion.

"Are you going to stay here for the rest of the day?" Jasmine asked while glancing at the window, finding the orange color from the light.

Noel thought for a moment. Since he had promised to meet Anna three days later, he still had some time. "If you don't mind, that is."

"Of course, I don't mind." Jasmine was delightful to host Noel again. There was also a regret in her heart. "I also want to apologize to you for my interruption in your fight. If not for my shout, you would have completed your job perfectly."

"Not at all. I can understand that normal people won't easily know about the demons' behaviors. So, I have considered it before fighting them." Noel waved his hand as if telling her not to mind it anymore.

"Is that so?" Jasmine believed Noel was the only one who had this kind heart. If it was any other knights from the Demon Banner Army, they would have berated them or even taken some advantages.

"As long as you don't make the same mistake again, it's all good," added Noel.

Jasmine realized Noel was actually comforting her despite her making a mistake. She looked at Noel for a while as though she was recalling something. "That's right. Don't worry about the villagers, I'll be taking care of them. I don't know why but you seem to be a bit rushing. Do you have an appointment or something?"

"Yeah. That'll help. Thank you."

"No, I should be the one thanking you." She paused for a moment before changing the topic. "Anyway, you said you want to talk about your father. What do you want to know?"

"Everything you know about my parents."

"Mhm. I have only met your father, so I'll just talk about him. The first time I met your father was twelve years ago. Back then, your father was hosting a banquet and I came with my father there.

"I slightly felt left out and tired, so I walked to the outside to get some air. It was then your father came to me, asking whether I'm sad or not. I had a sullen look back then.

"But he soon changed his words and asked whether I'm troubled or not. Do you know why?"

Noel tilted his head in confusion. "I'm not very sure."

"Your father said 'A wise man once said people said a word, but you heard two.' That saying was always in my head ever since."

"People said a word, but you heard two..." Noel muttered in a low voice, looked down, and fell into deep thought.

Jasmine smiled upon Noel's reaction. It seemed that Noel had caught something and was pondering about it.

"I think I've got it, but I can't put it in words." Noel scratched the back of his head.

"Well, your father didn't say anything as well. I tried to figure out and what I found was that... you listened to others but also saw their expressions and gestures. For example, I had a sullen look, so your father thought I'm sad.

"But when I heard that question, my expression was distorted a bit, making your father realize I'm not. So, he changed whether I'm troubled or not."

"Ah! That is possible too." Noel nodded in understanding.

"Well, I wasn't sad at that time because I had accepted my fate to become a political tool. However, I also shared my problem with him."

"About you wanting to escape the political marriage?"

"Yes." Jasmine confirmed it without hesitation. "Then, your father asked me to work for him and he even bought me from my house. He paid a huge sum of money that my father couldn't endure and even promised the favor of the Ardagan House.

"Back then, it was basically a better deal than a political marriage, so he agreed and sent me to work for him. Of course, he didn't do it out of pity. I was already known as a nerd back then, who loved to read books and experiments stuff.

"He set up a laboratory for myself to learn and experience stuff. Getting such an overwhelming favor, I worked earnestly. I wanted to repay his favor.

"That's why I've been producing all kinds of things. One of them being an irrigation in the flatland. It can increase the harvest in Ardagan's territory, so the increase in profit is a way for me to repay him.

"And until now, I'm still researching many things about agriculture." Jasmine paused for a moment to look at Noel's face, reminding her of his father, Luke Ardagan. "Do you plan to reinstate your family, Noel?"

"Yes." Noel answered without hesitation.

Jasmine thought Noel answered it as formality or his words were driven of his anger or anything. But when she saw his expression, Jasmine was astonished.

The man before him seemed to want to do it because it was a part of his ambition. And he looked like he already had a plan to climb his way back, unlike any other people who wanted to rebuild their family but not thinking a single plan.

Jasmine fell silent for a moment before rising from her seat. She walked to Noel and dropped to her knees.

"Jasmine?"

Jasmine politely lowered her head to him and said, "Young Master Noel. When you've successfully reclaim your territory, Jasmine will ride to your place without hesitation. I hope that Young Master doesn't reject me at that time."

Noel's body trembled. This was a kind of pledge of loyalty that Jasmine offered to him. However, he was only a fallen noble right now.

That was why this pledge weighed even heavier. This was Jasmine entrusting her future to Noel.

Noel closed his eyes for a moment, steeling his resolve. He clenched his fists and looked at Jasmine with a serious expression.

"I am nothing but a commoner right now. However, I have a desire to ride back to my territory as the lord, not a visitor. I don't know if I can be a good lord, but I'll do my best to become a good person. If you can overlook of my inability and inexperience, and assist me, I shall strive forward to become a good lord."

Chapter 278 A Lord's Quality

Noel and Jasmine looked at each other with a smile. This was Noel's first time saying all those words, so he felt weird, wondering if he had made any mistake in his words.

Jasmine, on the other hand, smiled at him, saying, "No one can be perfect and know everything. That's why we're together, so one can help the other. I hope that I can work together with Young Master in the future."

"Me too."

Jasmine politely stood up and returned to her seat. "Well, it might be impolite to ask this, but do you plan to remake the Ardagan's business?"

Noel fell silent upon this question. Ardagan's business consisted of several things. The three big businesses of Ardagan consisted of Agriculture, Smithy, and Loan.

Noel had heard about them from time to time, but he never learned them from his father directly. That was why he couldn't say he was adept in any of them.

However, Noel had one thought before taking the lord's position. "I have no experience in any of them, but I have the desire to learn about them. There is also another reason why I often come to the village on a mission from the Demon Banner Army.

"I wish to learn from them. Their work, their living style, and their struggle. In this village, the farmland is good and everyone can have a bountiful harvest every year. In another village, they have an abundant water and many river fishes, but they have to struggle with life and death every day.

"In another village, they have no abundant things, but they have enough to continue their lives. However, they're haunted with bandits and feared their turn would come.

"I've come to learn that everyone has their own advantages and disadvantages. One job in one's place might not be the same as the one in another place.

"That's why right now... I want to learn from them as much as possible, so I know what has to be done when I become a lord.

"I can't give you the answer to your question, but I can tell you this... I'll do the business that I know the core of that business.

"If I want to do an Agriculture Business, I have to know about the farmland, the irrigation, and the farmers themselves. If I want to rebuild the smithy, I have to go to the mine to understand the danger lying deep inside it. If I want to create a loan business, I have to understand their struggle and their limit. This is my answer."

Jasmine opened her eyes in shock. This kind of answer from a fifteen years old boy was unheard of.

In the first mission to save a village, Noel saved people from bandits. In the second mission to save a village, he had to break a beaver's dam to free the village. In his third mission, Noel saved an entire city. And lastly, in his visit to get his armor, he learned a bit about mining.

This was Noel's experience. A precious experience that he would never have if he stayed in his mission.

Jasmine smiled. "That's enough, Young Master. I'm anticipating the time I can ride back to your territory."

"Thank you." Noel nodded.

"Ah, we've deviated too much from our conversation. Let's continue about the tale of your father, shall we?"

Noel agreed as Jasmine continued recounting her memory about his father to understand the struggle of his father.

They talked too long to the point the night had passed.

"Mhmmm!" Jasmine stretched her body while letting out a soft moan. "It seems that we've talked for too long. You couldn't even get a wink of sleep..."

"It's fine. It was a lot of fun to listen to you." Noel waved his hand. He learned how much knowledge Jasmine had in one area. She might not be as good as others in another topic, but he could rely on her in Agriculture. "I guess this is the time for me to go."

"Do you want to get some sleep first?"

"No, someone is waiting for me." Noel shook his head calmly.

"Is that so? Well, I'll see you off." Jasmine extended her hand as if guiding him to the outside of their village. She stood there until Noel's back couldn't be seen anymore.

After that, she returned to her home with a smile, couldn't contain her excitement after talking with Noel.

But when she closed the door of her house, she suddenly felt an eerie atmosphere from her house. The temperature seemed to have dropped slightly, giving a chill down her spine.

"This is..." Jasmine wasn't an expert like Noel, but she seemed to know something was going on. Of course, it came from her experience.

"This looks like someone is in my house... And that person is..." She looked around before pointing at her own shadow. "Uncle Dimitri."

A pair of eyes and a mouth suddenly appeared on her shadow, smiling. Suddenly, a small black-colored tornado came out of the ground as Dimitri came out from within.

"It's truly you, Uncle Dimitri. You can't scare me anymore." Jasmine stuck her tongue out before remembering something important. "But why are you here? It's as if you are following... No, wait..."

Dimitri nodded. "I'm following the young master."

"What? Why do you do that? If I'm not wrong, you have a good reputation in the kingdom, right? I thought you were working somewhere."

"What are you talking about?" Dimitri shook his head. "I was the first one to swear my loyalty to Young Master Noel."

"So, I'm the second."

"No, you're third."

"Huh? Who's the second one?"

"I'm not going to answer that. You'll find out later anyway."

"So, because you can't scare me anymore, you're going to leave me in suspense."

"Exactly."

"Tsk." Jasmine clicked her tongue before sighing, dropping the matter. "Still... to think the young master has you in his side. Are you planning to train him to become like Master Luke?"

"No. I'm not planning to do anything. I don't even want to appear before him... I just resolve any problem beyond his own abilities until the right moment."

"I see. But I guess Young Master Noel's experience is a good boost to his career. Will he surpass his father?"

"Don't you see the blade on his waist?"

"The blade?" Jasmine closed her eyes for a moment before realizing the meaning of that blade. "That's the family's heirloom, Ardagan. And the only one who managed to wield that blade..."

"Yes. I believe that Young Master has the ability to surpass not only his father, but his ancestor. But before he reaches that point, I'm going to stay by his side."

Jasmine felt more excited. She couldn't wait to see that moment, but she still couldn't let go the previous matter. She playfully asked, "So, mind telling me who's the second?"

"Goodbye." Dimitri disappeared into the shadow again and the room's atmosphere returned to normal.

"..."

Chapter 279 Arrival

Noel immediately headed to the previous junction where he was separated with Anna.

Surprisingly, Anna had been waiting for him as if she was camping there just to wait for him.

"You've been waiting here this whole time?" Noel asked while stopping his horse.

"I have finished my mission in a day, so yeah." Anna nodded, confirming it.

"I see." Noel nodded. Compared to her, he was taking his time to talk with Jasmine. However, he wasn't late, so he didn't say much about it.

"Anyway, are we going to start completing the other four missions?"

"Yeah. We're going to raise our pace from now on."

"Sounds good to me." Anna asked, "Let me take another look at the map."

Noel didn't know what she was planning, but he still took out the map of their journey.

"The four missions are like this and the Body Strengthening Liquid is in this area."

"Yeah, it's close to the border, so we might need to face stronger demons."

"Indeed. Though, take a look at this village. This is the farthest village we can go, so how about staying here for a day?"

"To rest?" Noel tilted his head in confusion. Whenever they traveled together, they never had a need to rest their bodies in a village or a town. So, this suggestion came out of nowhere.

"No, I'm talking about the Demon Crystals. I think it's good to have you become a Spirit Wielder before we go to this place since we might face Advanced Level Demons or an even stronger demon..."

"Ah!" Noel finally understood what she meant. Anna was just worried that she had to take care of him when they had to fight those demons. Of course, Noel didn't reject the idea. "That's a good idea. I won't be a burden anyway."

"Burden, what..." Anna felt like Noel misunderstood her. She was simply worried about his well-being, not about him becoming a burden.

"Anyway, are you planning to give me all the Demon Crystals? I don't think we can get enough Demon Crystals to make me reach Spirit Wielder if we share it."

Anna thought about giving it away without any care, but she remembered the case in the Earldom, where she almost lost to Noel. Noel also would feel suspicious if she didn't receive anything because it would make him look like he owed her greatly.

That was why Anna nodded and said, "Sure. I don't mind that if it means we can go there safely. Though, make sure you pay me back."

"That's easy. We can hunt some demons after obtaining the liquid." Noel nodded. "Alright. Let's go with that plan."

Noel and Anna reached an agreement as they began to move to their next destination.

In the next two weeks, Noel and Anna were entering several places to exterminate the demons.

Whenever they reached a village, Noel would learn something new from their village while Anna was standing next to Noel to absorb his knowledge and action.

At the same time, they also did their job splendidly. They also had to eliminate many Mid Level Demons, in which turned out to be commanded by an Advanced Level Demon in their last mission.

This would be a huge problem for anyone since they had no power to defeat an Advanced Level Demon.

But Anna and Noel were different. When the Advanced Level Demon attacked them, this pair actually bullied the demon by beating it black and blue.

It was a pitiful sight because the Advanced Level Demon looked like it was about to cry right before its death.

In the end, they accomplished all their missions perfectly and there was no one stopping them to do whatever they wanted after this. They were already eligible to become a full-fledged knight after all.

It took another three days for Noel and Anna to reach the furthest village before reaching the border.

The village wasn't that big, considering they had to be prepared to be attacked by the demons. It would be easier for them to leave if they had a small number after all.

This place was often used for the knights to patrol the area as well, so the village looked a bit better compared to what they had seen.

Although the population was less than fifty people, they were still young or middle-aged people. They were still strong enough to run with all their strength.

When Noel and Anna reached the village, one of the villagers welcomed them.

The middle-aged man was wearing an armor as if he was in charge of the village's protection.

"Welcome to Aurel Village. May I know the purpose of your visit?" The middle-aged man asked.

"We're from the Demon Banner Army. We're here to rest in this village before going forward." Noel showed the badge and stated their purpose vaguely.

,m After seeing the badge, the middle-aged man nodded and said, "Welcome to Aurel Village. I hope that you've got a pleasant stay in this village. Although I'll be doing my best to protect the village, I can't assure everyone's safety."

"Is there something wrong?" Noel furrowed his eyebrows since the guard shouldn't be saying something like this.

"Well..." The middle-aged man scratched the back of his head. "I don't know either. It's just the demon's activity has been increasing lately..."

Noel thought for a moment as if he was trying to figure out anything. Meanwhile, Anna asked, "You should have an inn, right?"

"Yes. There is a small inn in the village. You can go to the center of the village and turn left to find the inn. It's usually used to host knights, so its quality shouldn't be too bad."

"Alright." Noel was the one who answered him this time. It seemed he didn't find enough clue to ask something from the guard, so he just entered the village nonchalantly. "Let's go."

Anna nodded and followed him while observing the village's situation. It didn't seem that bad for a village that had the highest risk to be attacked by a demon. She could see some destructions here and there, but it was just the aftermath. All the essential stuff for a village had been repaired.

Though, Anna felt something bad this time and approached Noel. "Do you have time?"

"Let's talk in your room." Noel seemed to have sensed something wrong too and replied with a low voice.

"Alright."

Chapter 280 Warning

"I'm coming in." Noel knocked on Anna's door before entering her room. He carefully entered the room and asked, "How is my voice from outside?"

"It's quite loud."

"So, don't talk too loud here." Noel nodded and brought the chair next to the bed.

With Noel sitting in front of her, Anna lowered her voice and said, "Do you see the situation outside?"

"Yeah. It's pretty horrible."

"Most of them might be old, but some were certainly new, like within a week. Also, the inn is so expensive. I could stay for a week or even two in an inn with this quality elsewhere."

"They're simply taking advantage of their position and since it comes with a risk, so I can understand the price." Noel could understand the price because his family was a merchant family, but the other topic also concerned him a bit. "Anyway, let's not talk about the price."

"Well, I don't know much about it. I actually want to listen to your opinion."

Noel thought for a moment and told her the truth. "Personally, I believe that the guard is trying to warn us. It's clear that there is some kind of problem around here. Is it related to the liquid?"

"That's a possibility as well, considering this liquid also works for demons... But I'm not very sure because the entrance should be sealed."

"Sealed, huh. But what kind of problem will they face in this area? It's true that the demons are rather active around here. The missions we completed during our trip to this place signified an unusual movement from the demons."

"Yeah. I wonder what's happening right now. Should we report this to the Demon Banner Army?"

"I'm pretty sure someone has asked for help. But the problem is we're not here on a mission. Basically, we don't have any reason to help them."

"..." Anna frowned immediately, looking at Noel as if he had just said something unbelievable.

The usual Noel would have helped them after some inquiries, so it was surprising to see him rejecting this problem.

Noticing Anna's expression, Noel's eyebrows twitched. "What?"

"You don't want to help them?"

"No. This is a risk of living here. They're well aware that they're going to face danger if they stay here because of the distance to the border. But the fact they continue to stay here is due to them wanting more money since this place is filled with opportunity."

"..." Anna fell silent for a moment before realizing Noel ended his sentence with a gaze. He was continuously staring at her as if telling her something. Anna gasped and said, "Don't tell me... We are ones of the opportunity?"

"Yes." Noel nodded with a calm expression.

"Are you telling me they're going to poison us and kidnap us?"

"No, no. It's already too much for them. However, we're here bringing a few things, right?"

"Ah! They're going to take our belongings if we die?"

"Yes." Noel confirmed it. "Demons eat us, but not our belongings. There should be people who are waiting for us to die and steal our belongings from their mouth. That's why I don't want to do it."

"I see. I can understand that. After all, they're stealing from us."

"No, they're stealing from corpses. How we become a corpse is not their business. And if we leave any belongings here, it'll become theirs right after. For now, they're afraid of making any move to us because we're from the Demon Banner Army, but if we are not..."

"They're going to send us to our death?"

"Yeah. One way or another. It's simple to create a fake story for the visitors to investigate. Other than fighters like us, who are insane enough to visit the border?"

"That's true. Then, what should we do?"

"It's simple. Let's go tomorrow. I should be able to absorb all the Demon Crystals before midnight, so we'll leave at dawn. Don't give them any information even if it's just a casual talk."

"Understood."

"Also, there's one more thing you need to know..."

"What is it?"

"Don't show any weakness." Noel looked at her with a serious expression as if this was the most important matter.

"What do you...Ah!" Anna nodded in understanding. "Alright. I'll follow your advice. Still, to think you're already this experienced in dealing with these people. I thought you were lazying around this whole time?"

"I'm never a good person." Noel shook his head. He often tricked his own father, so he could get an alone time after all. That was why he was adept in this.

The Ardagan father and son had been trying to trick each other. The former wanted his son to work hard while the latter wanted to skip everything and relax. That was what trained Noel's mind.

"Anyway, that's all. I'm going to be busy absorbing the crystals, so if you don't have any business outside, it's better to stay in your room." Noel rose from his seat while giving his last advice.

"Alright. I'll listen to your words. So, we're going to meet again to have dinner?"

Noel thought for a moment and nodded. "Sure. Just call me if I don't remember."

"Got it." Anna suddenly smirked, trying to tease him before he left. "Since I'm in danger, how about I sleep in your room? This way, we can protect each other."

"No way. This is not my mansion, so the bed is small. If you're going to sleep there too, it'll be too cramped. So, no!"

"..." Anna was speechless because Noel was leaving after brutally rejecting her. However, she also noticed two things from their conversation.

The first one was the fact Noel never considered about letting her sleep on the floor. Though, he also didn't want to sleep there since it was his right. Either way, it was a part of his consideration of her.

As for the second one, Anna couldn't help but smile slyly, muttering inwardly, "From the looks of it, it seems that Noel hasn't prepared anything for the Body Strengthening Liquid... Hehe, you're going to be surprised of what you'll find later. And we'll see who's chickening later."